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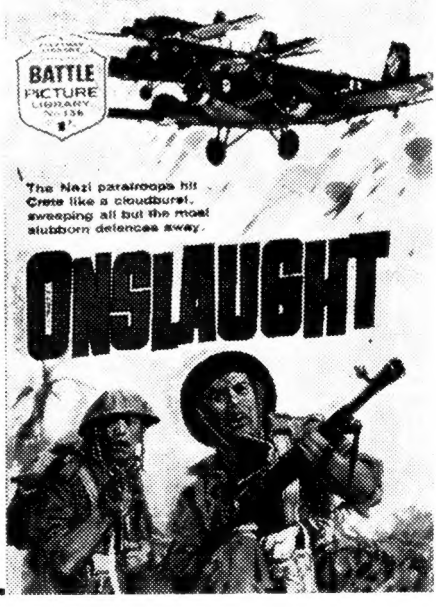

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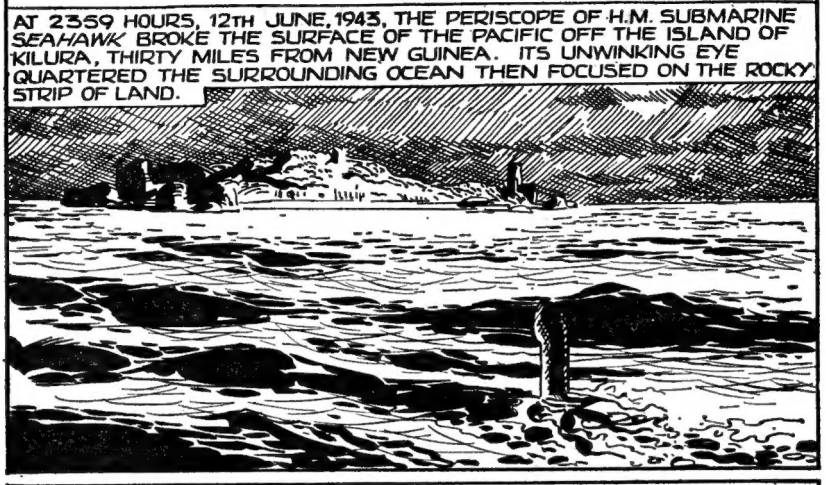
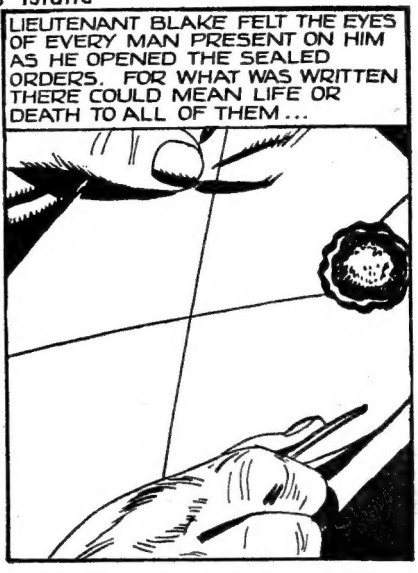
Chapter 1. Operation Octopus

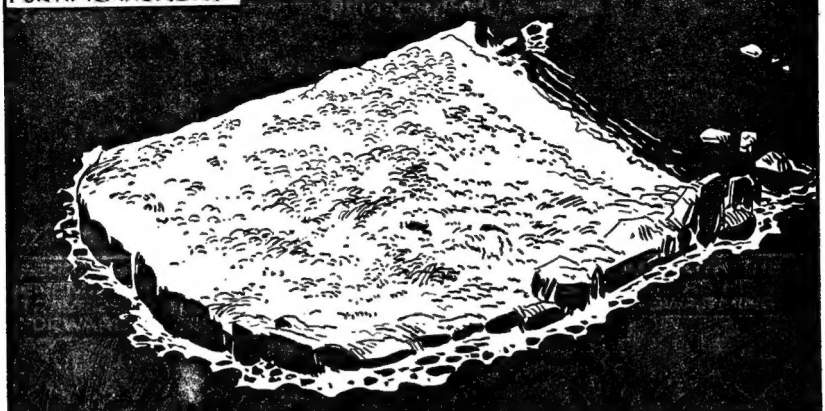


THE TWO OFFICERS ENTERED THE OPPRESSIVE ATMOSPHERE OF THE COMPARTMENT AFT, WHERE A SERGEANT AND FOUR SOLDIERS LOOKED UP EXPECTANTLY.
RELAX, MEN! WHEN I OPEN THESE ORDERS WE'LL KNOW THE WHY, WHERE AND HOW OF THIS TRIP.
LET'S HAVE THE GLAD TIDINGS. I'LL LAY TEN TO ONE IT AIN'T FOR OUR PERISHIN' HEALTH.


LIEUTENANT BLAKE FELT THE EYES OF EVERY MAN PRESENT ON HIM AS HE OPENED THE SEALED ORDERS. FOR WHAT WAS WRITTEN THERE COULD MEAN LIFE OR DEATH TO ALL OF THEM...

CAREFULLY, LIEUTENANT WALLY BLAKE READ THROUGH THE ORDERS. THEN HE SPREAD A MAP ON THE STEEL DECK...
BRIEFLY, IT'S THIS! WE'VE GOT TO BREACH THE UNDER-WATER DEFENCE BOOMS ACROSS THE MOUTH OF THIS LAGOON. OUR SUCCESS SIGNAL MUST BE RELAYED TO THE TASK FORCE BY 0-TWO-THIRTY HOURS. THE LANDING CRAFT COME IN AT FIRST LIGHT.

THE ISLAND OF KILURA HAD PROVIDED THE JAPANESE WITH AN IDEAL BASE FROM WHICH TO STRIKE AT THE ALLIED CONVOYS. ITS NATURAL DEFENCES WERE BACKED UP WITH DEEPLY BURIED FORTIFICATIONS...



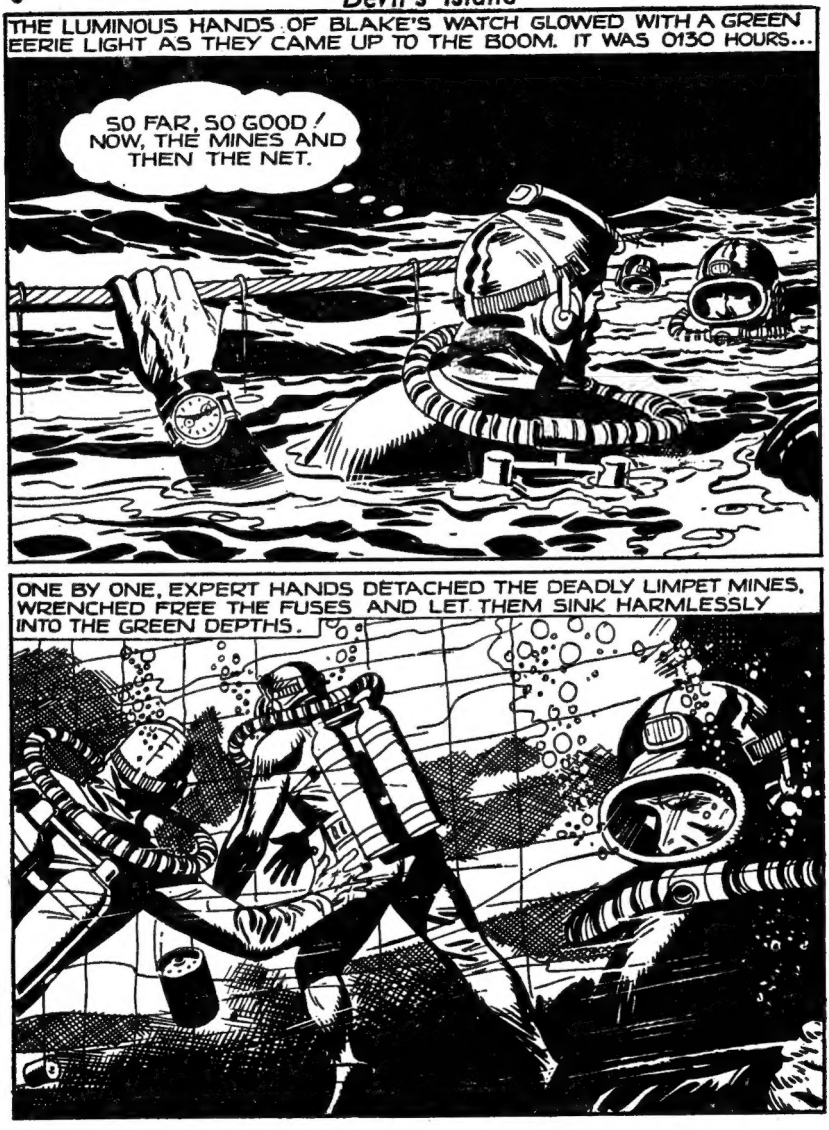
IT WOULD BE A HARD NUT TO CRACK AND THAT TASK HAD FALLEN TO THE XITH ASSAULT BATTALION, AUSTRALIAN IMPERIAL FORCE...

BLAKE SCANNED THE IMPASSIVE FACES OF THE TOUGH YOUNG MEN AROUND HIM. IT WAS A SUICIDE MISSION BUT THEY SHOWED NO EMOTION. THE RASPING VOICE OF SERGEANT DINGO DRISCOLL BROKE THE SILENCE...

THE FIVE MEN DONNED THEIR AQUALUNG EQUIPMENT AND SHUFFLED AWKWARDLY INTO POSITION AS THE COMMANDER CONNED THE SUBMARINE TOWARDS THE SHORE LINE...

THE OCEAN BOILED AS THE VESSEL BROKE SURFACE. FROM THE HATCHES, MEN SWARMED UP INTO THE HUMID TROPICAL NIGHT AIR.

ONE BY ONE, THE FROGMEN SLIPPED SOFTLY INTO THE TEPID WATERS. WITHIN THREE MINUTES H.M.S. *SEAHAWK* HAD RETURNED TO THE DEPTHS, TO BEGIN HER SILENT VIGIL.


THE LUMINOUS HANDS OF BLAKE'S WATCH GLOWED WITH A GREEN EERIE LIGHT AS THEY CAME UP TO THE BOOM. IT WAS 0130 HOURS...
SO FAR, SO GOOD! NOW, THE MINES AND THEN THE NET.
ONE BY ONE, EXPERT HANDS DETACHED THE DEADLY LIMPET MINES, WRENCHED FREE THE FUSES AND LET THEM SINK HARMLESSLY INTO THE GREEN DEPTHS.

WITHIN MINUTES, CASE-HARDENED STEEL PINCERS STARTED TO BITE THROUGH THE LONG STRANDS OF THE BOOM NET...
THE MISSION WAS WORKING SMOOTHLY. BUT ONE OF THE MEN DID NOT NOTICE THE SLENDER STEEL THREAD THAT CAUGHT MOMENTARILY AT HIS FOOT.
IN A JAPANESE GUARDROOM ASHORE A SENTRY JERKED TO ALERTNESS AS A RED LIGHT FLASHED ITS WARNING IN FRONT OF HIM.
SERGEANT HOKUSAI! SOMETHING HAS TRIGGERED THE ALARM!
IT COULD BE ANOTHER CURSED CUTTLEFISH. BUT I'LL INFORM THE DUTY OFFICER.
THIN REEDY VOICES PIPED OVER COMMUNICATION LINES. TWO MINUTES LATER, COLONEL KINTO, GARRISON COMMANDER, WAS INFORMED.
EXCELLENCY, THE GUARDS AT MANCHU BEACH HAVE REPORTED AN ALARM. A PATROL BOAT HAS BEEN DESPATCHED TO INVESTIGATE.
SO! IT IS JUST POSSIBLE THE WHITE DOGS COME TONIGHT. BRING ME MY UNIFORM – QUICKLY! I WILL INVESTIGATE MYSELF.

THE FIVE AUSTRALIANS HAD ONLY ONE LAST STEEL HAWSER TO SEVER, WHEN THE DARKNESS WAS SLICED OPEN BY THE BLINDING GLARE OF A SEARCHLIGHT.
WHITE DEVILS! WE HAVE THEM TRAPPED! START THE ENGINE!

THE AUSTRALIANS STOOD NO CHANCE OF ESCAPE. AS THE POWERFUL BOAT SWEPT DOWN UPON THEM, LIEUTENANT BLAKE SAW A SMALL FIGURE STANDING IN THE BOWS...
LOOK OUT, LADS! THAT JAP MEANS BUSINESS!

ENCUMBERED WITH HIS OXYGEN CYLINDERS, LIEUTENANT BLAKE WAS TOO SLOW TO AVOID THE LITHE YELLOW BODY THAT PLUNGED TOWARDS HIM. JAPANESE HANDS WRENCHED HIS MOUTHPIECE AWAY...
MOMENTS LATER, BLAKE AND DRISCOLL WERE DRAGGED ABOARD THE JAPANESE PATROL BOAT. THEN, WITH A SAVAGE GRIN, THE MACHINE GUNNER HOSED DEATH AT THE REMAINING HEADS BOBBING IN THE WATER.
GOOD! OUR PRISONERS ARE STILL ALIVE. COLONEL SAN WILL REWARD US WELL FOR THIS NIGHT'S WORK!

THE TWO AUSSIES GAZED UP DEFIANTLY AT THE CRUEL, MIRTHLESS SMILE ON THE JAPANESE COLONEL'S FACE. IT SEEMED TO THEM THAT THEIR COMRADES WHO HAD DIED SWIFTLY HAD BEEN THE LUCKY ONES.
DO YOUR DARNDEST, YOU LITTLE RAT! YOU'LL GET NOTHING FROM US!
BRAVE WORDS, MY FRIENDS. BUT BY THE LORDS OF FUJIYAMA, THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO MAKE A MAN TALK! WE SHALL SEE!

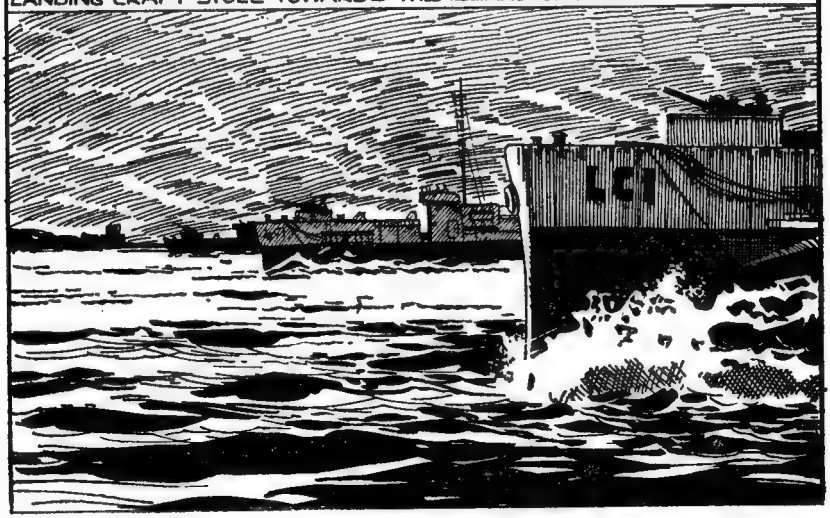
TEN AGONISING MINUTES LATER, COLONEL KINTO HAD JUSTIFIED HIS MACABRE PREDICTION. WITH A SAVAGE GRIN OF TRIUMPH HE HURLED ORDERS AT HIS SUBORDINATES.
SO, THE FOREIGN DOGS COME WITH THE DAWN. REPLACE THE MINE-FIELDS. THEY SHALL FIND DEATH WAITING WITH THE RISING SUN!
AS YOUR EXCELLENCY COMMANDS.

AT 0215 HOURS, H.M.S. SEAHAWK WAS ON THE SURFACE, HER COMMANDER SCANNING THE DARKENED SHORELINE. THEN A BLUE LIGHT WINKED. THREE LONG FLASHES FOLLOWED BY TWO BRIEF STABS. THERE WAS RELIEF IN HIS VOICE AS HE SPOKE QUIETLY INTO THE VOICE PIPE.
MAKE A SIGNAL TO FLAG SHIP, NUMBER ONE. PHASE ONE OPERATION OCTOPUS COMPLETED. STAND BY, DIVING STATIONS.
WELL DONE, THE AUSSIES!

Chapter 2. The Quisling

A CODED MESSAGE CRACKLED THROUGH THE ETHER, AND ABOARD THE FLAGSHIP OF THE TASK FORCE, A TIGHT-LIPPED BRIGADIER GAVE THE FINAL ORDER TO LAUNCH SIX HUNDRED MEN INTO THE ATTACK.

THE PALE TRACE OF DAWN TINGED THE SKY AS THE FIRST WAVE OF LANDING CRAFT STOLE TOWARDS THE ISLAND OF KILURA...



THE LEADING CRAFT GLIDED IN THROUGH THE DECEPTIVELY PEACEFUL MOUTH OF THE LAGOON. THEN THE SEA BENEATH HER ERUPTED VIOLENTLY AND THE ISLAND AWOKE TO THE DEAFENING ROAR OF AN EXPLODING MINE.

FOR PETRIFIED SECONDS, COLONEL HARDY STARED HELPLESSLY AS THE L.C.I. FOUNDERED SWIFTLY IN THE SEETHING WATER, AND GUN-FIRE FROM THE SHORE LASHED THE SEA TO FOAM.

IN ANSWER TO THE THREE RED VEREY LIGHTS THAT LOOPED INTO THE SKY, THE UNGAINLY CRAFT BROKE FORMATION. BUT ONE OF THE LANDING CRAFT WAS TOO LATE TO ANSWER THE HELM. THE BARRIER REEF LOOMED REMORSELESSLY AHEAD.

THE DOOMED VESSEL STRUCK THE REEF WITH A SICKENING IMPACT. THEN, THE HARD-BITTEN DIGGERS WERE FIGHTING THROUGH THE FLYING SPRAY TO GAIN A FOOTHOLD ON THE RAZOR-EDGED CORAL.
SPREAD OUT AND GET WHAT COVER YOU CAN!
CURSING AND GASPING, THE VETERANS FLUNG THEMSELVES DOWN.
WISH WE WERE BACK IN THAT NICE COSY LITTLE NEW GUINEA JUNGLE, COBBER!
BELT UP, DUSTY, AND SHAKE THE PACIFIC OUT O' THAT BREN. WE'LL SHOW THE NIPS IT AIN'T HEALTHY TO TANGLE WITH DIGGERS.

BUT COLONEL KINTO WAS AFTER BIGGER FISH THAN THE HANDFUL OF MEN WHO CLUNG TO THAT PERILOUS STRIP OF ROCK.
LEAVE THOSE FOOLS ON THE REEF. WE CAN PICK THEM OFF LATER. ORDER THE MUTSUHITO SQUADRON TO ATTACK. THESE WHITE DOGS SHALL LEARN THEY HAVE AROUSED A TIGER!

ONE AFTER ANOTHER, THE SLEEK BOMBERS SCREAMED DOWN THE CAMOUFLAGED RUNWAYS AND KNIFED INTO THE AIR.

ABOARD THE FLAGSHIP, BRIGADIER NEWMAN STARED ACROSS THE SEA. THE THREE RED BURSTS IN THE SKY AND THE LINE OF RETREATING BOATS TOLD THEIR OWN TRAGIC TALE.

THE BRIGADIER GAVE HIS PERMISSION AND H.M.S *SARACEN* SPED TOWARDS THE REEF, HER 4·7's PUMPING SHELLS SHOREWARD ONE OF THEM FELL CLOSE TO WHERE SERGEANT DRISCOLL LAY PEGGED TO THE GROUND...

BY A FREAK OF CHANCE, A FRAGMENT OF SHRAPNEL FREED HIS BONDS AND SLOWLY AND PAINFULLY, HE STARTED TO CRAWL ACROSS THE BEACH. HE DID NOT LOOK BACK, FOR HE KNEW LIEUTENANT BLAKE WAS DEAD...

THE BOMBARDMENT GAVE FRESH HEART TO THE THIN LINE OF AUSTRALIANS STRUNG OUT ALONG THE REEF.
THERE'S SOMETHING MOVING OUT THERE ON THE BEACH! BY ALL THE STARS, IT'S AN AUSSIE!
HEY, LOOEY! THE NAVY'S COMING INTO PICK US OFF!
HE'LL NEVER MAKE IT ON HIS OWN— GIVE ME COVERING FIRE!
STONE THE CROWS! HE DIDN'T EVEN LISTEN! COME ON, DUSTY, FETCH THAT PEASHOOTER ALONG. HE'S GOING TO NEED HELP.
CURSING LOUDLY, CORPORAL NED KELLY AND HIS MATE, DUSTY MILLER, FOLLOWED THE LIEUTENANT...

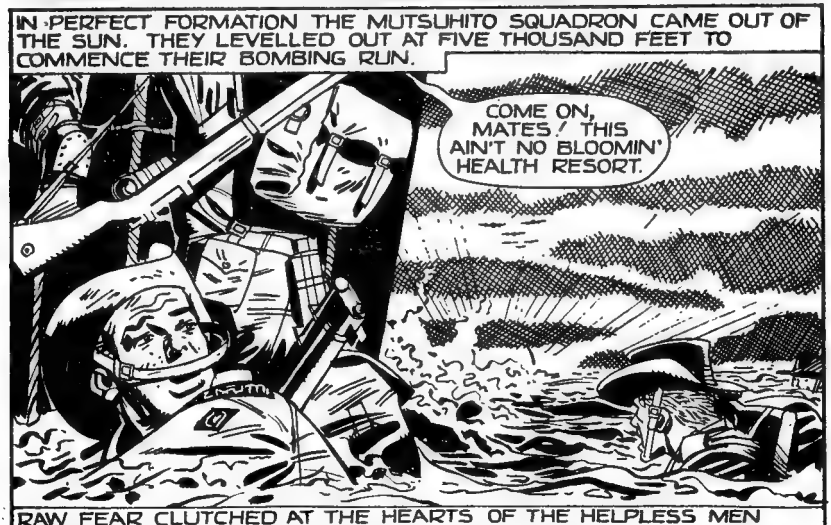
WITH CRUEL PATIENCE A JAPANESE GUNNER HAD WATCHED SERGEANT DRISCOLL DRAG HIMSELF ACROSS THE BARREN SAND. CAREFULLY, HE HAD LINED UP HIS SIGHTS. THEN, SUDDENLY, THREE FIGURES BROKE COVER FROM THE REEF AND THE VICIOUS BURST RAN WILD...

WHINING BULLETS BIT INTO THE SAND AROUND THEM. BUT BEFORE THE JAPANESE COULD CORRECT HIS AIM CORPORAL KELLY TOSSED A GRENADE...

MORE ENEMY GUNS OPENED UP, LACING THE BEACH WITH ENFILADE FIRE. THE AUSTRALIAN OFFICER NEVER FLINCHED...
YOU WANTED A FIGHT, NIPS ? YOU'VE PICKED THE RIGHT BLOKE !

AS THEY REACHED THE SAFETY OF THE BARRIER REEF, DUSTY LOOKED BACK TO SEE THE LONE FIGURE LURCH DRUNKENLY AS THE JAPANESE GUNFIRE LATCHED ON TO HIM.
HE'S COPPED IT, DUSTY.
POOR OLD LOOEY ! I'VE KNOW A DURN SIGHT WORSE THAN 'IM !
DUSTY'S WORDS WERE AS CLOSE TO RESPECT AS A DIGGER COULD GET WHEN HE WAS SPEAKING OF AN OFFICER.

MEANWHILE, H.M.S. SARACEN, HER SIDES DRAPED WITH SCRAMBLING NETS, HAD EDGED PERILOUSLY CLOSE TO THE REEF IN A DESPERATE ATTEMPT AT RESCUE...
COME ON, AUSSIES, SWIM FOR IT! WE'RE NOT STAYING HERE FOR THE DURATION!
ENEMY AIRCRAFT! BEARING, RED THREE ZERO!


IN PERFECT FORMATION THE MUTSUHITO SQUADRON CAME OUT OF THE SUN. THEY LEVELLED OUT AT FIVE THOUSAND FEET TO COMMENCE THEIR BOMBING RUN.
COME ON, MATES! THIS AIN'T NO BLOOMIN' HEALTH RESORT.
RAW FEAR CLUTCHED AT THE HEARTS OF THE HELPLESS MEN STRUGGLING TO REACH THE SAFETY OF THE NETS.

BUT, FOR THE MOMENT, THE MEN STRUGGLING IN THE WATER WERE SAFE, FOR THE BOMBERS PEELED OFF AND SCREAMED DOWN ON TO THE LONG LINE OF ASSAULT CRAFT CRAWLING BACK TOWARDS THE TASK FORCE.

NOW THE ENEMIES OF NIPPON SHALL DIE! ATTACK!

LCI

THE FLEET PUMPED HIGH EXPLOSIVE SKYWARD AS FAST AS SHELLS COULD BE SLAMMED INTO THE HOT BREECHES OF THE GUNS. BUT FOR THE AUSSIES, IT WAS A MASSACRE.

OF THE SIX HUNDRED MEN WHO HAD GONE INTO THE ASSAULT, LESS THAN TWO HUNDRED WERE DRAGGED BACK ABOARD THE WAITING SHIPS. COLONEL TOM HARDY WAS ONE OF THE LAST TO BE SNATCHED TO PRECARIOUS SAFETY.
GET THOSE MEN BELOW — AT THE DOUBLE!
STEADY, SIR. I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND.
I'M ALL RIGHT! MY MEN! HOW MANY SURVIVED?

LIKE ANGRY HORNETS, THE JAPANESE PLANES DIVED AGAIN AND AGAIN AT THE TASK FORCE, AS IT BROKE UP UNDER COVER OF SMOKE SCREENS AND TRIED TO LIMP FOR THE SAFETY OF THE OPEN SEA.
I-BIKI

WHIPPED AND BEATEN, THEY SLUNK AWAY SOUTH-WEST TO LICK THEIR WOUNDS. GAUNT-FACED MEN LOOKED BACK TOWARDS THE BLACK SMEAR THAT WAS THE ISLAND OF KILURA.

WE WALKED STRAIGHT INTO IT. IT WAS PLAIN MURDER! HOW'S DRISCOLL NOW, KELLY?

HE'S OKAY! LUCKIEST BLOKE IN THE OUTFIT, I RECKON. MAYBE WHEN HE COMES ROUND HE'LL TELL US WHO PUT THE SQUEAK IN.

FOR A LONG WHILE, COLONEL HARDY STARED WITH UNSEEING EYES BACK ACROSS THE WATER...

FOUR HUNDRED MEN! THREE SHIPS AND LORD KNOWS WHAT EQUIPMENT LOST! FOR WHAT? NOT ONE INCH OF SOIL TAKEN. *WE PAID A BITTER PRICE FOR FAILURE TODAY!*

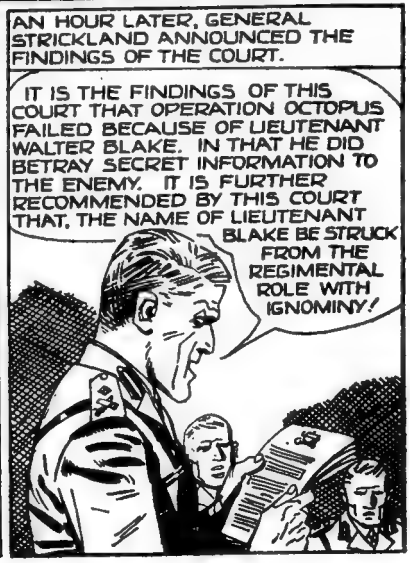
DON'T BLAME YOURSELF, TOM. MAYBE THE COURT OF ENQUIRY WILL DISCOVER WHAT WENT WRONG...

ONLY THE PLAINTIVE WAIL OF THE GULLS BROKE THE SILENCE OF MANCHU BEACH. SOON, THE TIDE WOULD TURN AND CLEANSE THE SANDS OF THE WRECKAGE THAT HAD ONCE BEEN "OPERATION OCTOPUS".

FORTY-EIGHT HOURS LATER, THE FORCE HAD REACHED THE SANCTUARY OF PAPUA. BITTERLY, THE COLONEL WATCHED HIS MEN DISEMBARK. FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE VAUNTED XITH. BATTALION HAD TASTED DEFEAT.
YOU'RE BEING MOVED BACK TO NUMBER THREE TRANSIT CAMP, TOM. G.H.Q. HAVE CONVENED A COURT OF ENQUIRY FOR 0-EIGHT-HUNDRED HOURS TOMORROW.
NEVER MIND THE ENQUIRY! LET'S HAVE MEN AND GUNS AND GET BACK AT THE JAPS. WE'VE GOT A SCORE TO SETTLE!
THE FOLLOWING MORNING, SENIOR OFFICERS GATHERED AT GROUP H.Q. FOR THE POST MORTEM ON THE OPERATION. ONE BY ONE, WITNESSES WERE CALLED FOR INTERROGATION. THEN, SUDDENLY, ALL EYES JERKED TOWARDS THE PRESIDING FIGURE OF GENERAL STRICKLAND.
GENTLEMEN, WE HAVE NOW COVERED EVERY ASPECT OF THIS OPERATION. IT WOULD SEEM THAT THERE REMAINS ONLY ONE WITNESS WHO COULD THROW ANY LIGHT ON THIS DISASTER. CALL SERGEANT DRISCOLL!

LEANING HEAVILY ON A STICK, HIS FACE PALE, THE SERGEANT FACED THE INQUISITION.
NOW, SERGEANT, WE HAVE HEARD THE TESTIMONY OF LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER YOUNG, THAT HE RECEIVED THE SUCCESS SIGNAL. YET OUR MEN WALKED STRAIGHT INTO A WELL PREPARED TRAP. I HAVE ONLY ONE QUESTION TO ASK YOU— WHO BETRAYED THE ATTACK PLANS TO THE JAPS ?
MP

THERE WAS NO ESCAPE FROM THE COLD EYES OF THE GENERAL. THE SERGEANT ANSWERED IN A DRY CROAKING VOICE.
IT WAS— IT WAS LIEUTENANT BLAKE, SIR! THEY TORTURED HIM. HE DID HIS BEST — JUST COULDN'T TAKE IT, I GUESS.


AN HOUR LATER, GENERAL STRICKLAND ANNOUNCED THE FINDINGS OF THE COURT.
IT IS THE FINDINGS OF THIS COURT THAT OPERATION OCTOPUS FAILED BECAUSE OF LIEUTENANT WALTER BLAKE. IN THAT HE DID BETRAY SECRET INFORMATION TO THE ENEMY. IT IS FURTHER RECOMMENDED BY THIS COURT THAT, THE NAME OF LIEUTENANT BLAKE BE STRUCK FROM THE REGIMENTAL ROLE WITH IGNOMINY!

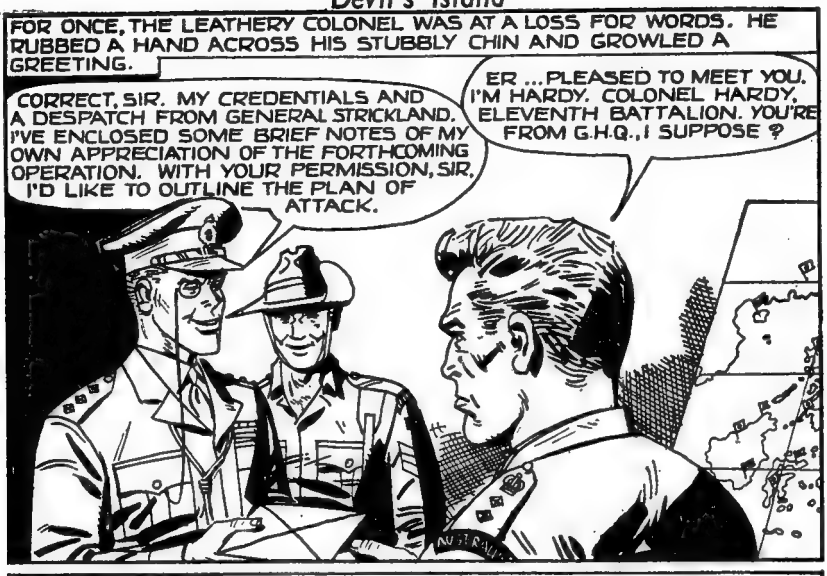
FOR SOME TIME AFTER THE COURT-ROOM HAD CLEARED, A LONE FIGURE REMAINED WITH SHOULDERS BOWED AND A FACE SUDDENLY AGED BY THE LAST FEW BITTER DAYS.
DON'T LET IT THROW YOU, TOM!
I WAS WITH BLAKE'S FATHER AT THE LANDING OF THE DARDANELLES. WE WERE BOTH SUBALTERNS THEN. HE WON THE M.C. THE NEWS OF HIS SON'S DISGRACE WILL BREAK HIM.

TWO WEEKS LATER, REINFORCEMENTS ARRIVED. SERGEANT DRISCOLL WAS AWARDED THE MILITARY MEDAL AND THE MEMORY OF DEFEAT DIMMED SLIGHTLY...
WELL, HERE'S TO YER, DRISCOLL, SPORT, AN' YOUR LOVELY SHINY GONG. YOU EARNED IT, MATE.
FUNNY THING, THOUGH, NEVER THOUGHT BLAKE WOULD RAT ON US TO THE NIPS. HE WAS ALWAYS SUCH A COOL BIRD...

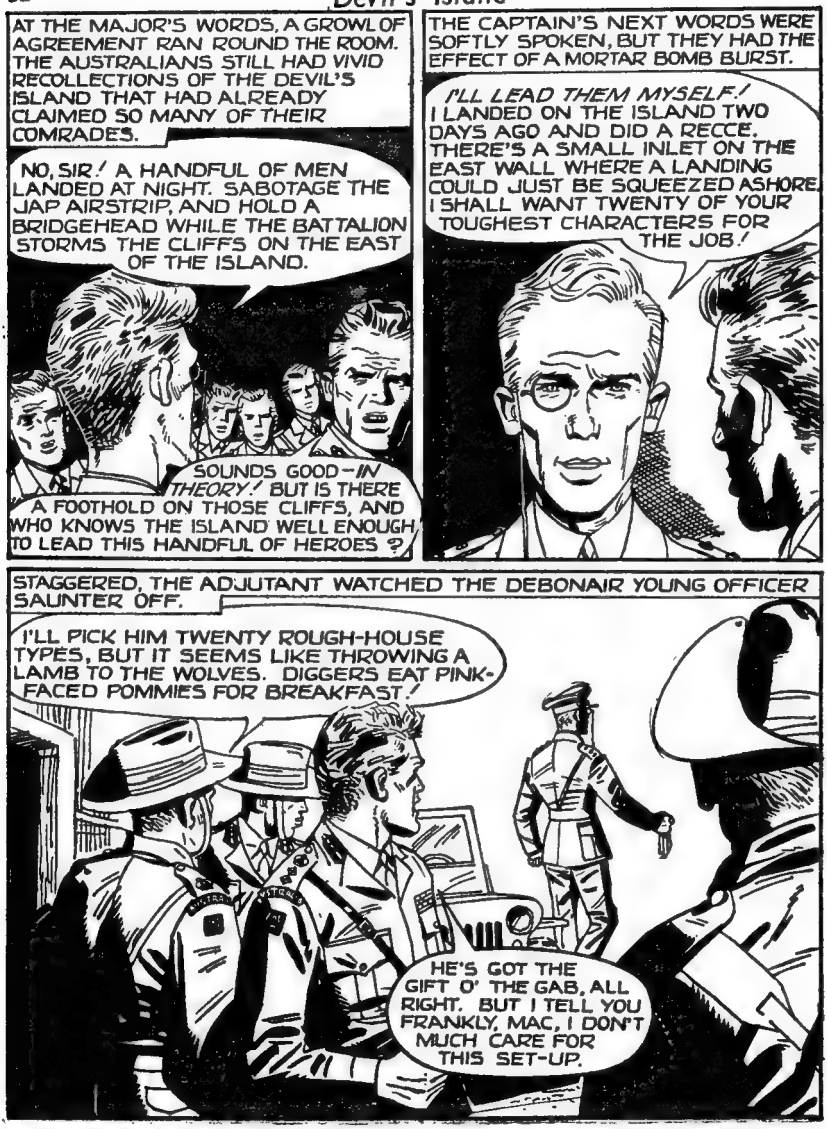
DRISCOLL'S CHAIR CRASHED BACK AS HE LURCHED TO HIS FEET. HE SNARLED INTO KELLY'S STARTLED FACE.
HOW THE DEVIL D'YOU KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO HAVE A JAP BAYONET PRODDING YOUR RIBS...
STEADY UP, COBBER./ NO OFFENCE MEANT.
A TENSE SILENCE FELL IN THE CANTEEN. THEN DRISCOLL TURNED, AND LURCHED OUT INTO THE NIGHT.
DINGO'S GOT A BIT TOUCHY SINCE WE CAME OFF THAT PERISHIN' ISLAND. HE MUST HAVE HAD IT ROUGH.
MAYBE./ THEN AGAIN, 'E WAS THE ONLY FROGMAN TO GET BACK. MAYBE IT'S HIS CONSCIENCE BOTHERING 'IM?

THE MORALE OF THE XITH. BATTALION WAS AT A LOW EBB AND COLONEL HARDY WAS GLAD WHEN AN URGENT SUMMONS CALLED HIM TO BRIGADE H.Q.
HELLO, TOM, HOW ARE THINGS SHAPING WITH YOUR OUTFIT ?
NOT SO HOT! THE MEN ARE RESTLESS. THE GREENHORNS HAVEN'T SHAKEN DOWN YET, AND HALF THE OLD SWEATS ARE ON DEFAULTERS. IT'S ACTION WE NEED!
XI INDEPENDENT BRIGADE A.I.F.
A SMILE CROSSED THE BRIGADIER'S FACE AS HE LED THE WAY TO A LARGE SCALE MODEL.
YOU'LL GET YOUR ACTION! TOP BRASS HAVE DECIDED THAT KILURA ISLAND MUST BE TAKEN AT ALL COSTS. YOUR UNIT WILL MOVE UP COUNTRY FOR INTENSIVE TRAINING. THEN YOU'LL GET THE CHANCE TO REGAIN YOUR BATTLE HONOURS.
GOOD, SIR! WE'LL TAKE KILURA THIS TIME, OR WE WON'T COME BACK AT ALL!
THERE'S ONE OTHER THING. G.H.Q. ARE SENDING UP SOME BLOKE FROM COMBINED OPS. HE'S A POMMIE, SUPPOSED TO BE A WIZARD AT THE CLOAK AND DAGGER STUFF. FLIES IN FROM PORT DARWIN TOMORROW, I'LL SEND HIM UP TO YOU, TOM.
I DON'T TAKE KINDLY TO BASE WALLAHS, BUT IF IT'S AN ORDER...

Chapter 3. Wolf in Sheep's Clothing!


FOR ONCE, THE LEATHERY COLONEL WAS AT A LOSS FOR WORDS. HE RUBBED A HAND ACROSS HIS STUBBLY CHIN AND GROWLED A GREETING.
ER ... PLEASED TO MEET YOU. I'M HARDY. COLONEL HARDY. ELEVENTH BATTALION. YOU'RE FROM G.H.Q., I SUPPOSE ?
CORRECT, SIR. MY CREDENTIALS AND A DESPATCH FROM GENERAL STRICKLAND. I'VE ENCLOSED SOME BRIEF NOTES OF MY OWN APPRECIATION OF THE FORTHCOMING OPERATION. WITH YOUR PERMISSION, SIR, I'D LIKE TO OUTLINE THE PLAN OF ATTACK.

THE COLONEL'S FACE TURNED AN APOPLECTIC RED, BUT THE DEBONAIR CAPTAIN WAS ALREADY ADDRESSING THE ASSEMBLED OFFICERS.
THE JAPS HAVE MADE ONE BIG MISTAKE WITH THEIR DEFENCE OF KILURA. ALL THEIR FIRE POWER IS CONCENTRATED TO STOP A LANDING ON MANCHU BEACH.
I WOULDN'T CALL IT A MISTAKE ! THEIR AIRSTRIPS ARE INVULNERABLE TO BOMBING. THEY CAN JUST SIT BACK AND KNOCK HELL OUT OF US AS WE LAND. THEY KNOW WHERE WE'LL LAND BECAUSE IT'S THE ONLY WAY ASHORE...


AT THE MAJOR'S WORDS, A GROWL OF AGREEMENT RAN ROUND THE ROOM. THE AUSTRALIANS STILL HAD VIVID RECOLLECTIONS OF THE DEVIL'S ISLAND THAT HAD ALREADY CLAIMED SO MANY OF THEIR COMRADES.
NO, SIR! A HANDFUL OF MEN LANDED AT NIGHT. SABOTAGE THE JAP AIRSTRIP, AND HOLD A BRIDGEHEAD WHILE THE BATTALION STORMS THE CLIFFS ON THE EAST OF THE ISLAND.
SOUNDS GOOD—IN THEORY! BUT IS THERE A FOOTHOLD ON THOSE CLIFFS, AND WHO KNOWS THE ISLAND WELL ENOUGH TO LEAD THIS HANDFUL OF HEROES?
THE CAPTAIN'S NEXT WORDS WERE SOFTLY SPOKEN, BUT THEY HAD THE EFFECT OF A MORTAR BOMB BURST.
I'LL LEAD THEM MYSELF! I LANDED ON THE ISLAND TWO DAYS AGO AND DID A RECCE. THERE'S A SMALL INLET ON THE EAST WALL WHERE A LANDING COULD JUST BE SQUEEZED ASHORE. I SHALL WANT TWENTY OF YOUR TOUGHEST CHARACTERS FOR THE JOB!
STAGGERED, THE ADJUTANT WATCHED THE DEBONAIR YOUNG OFFICER SAUNTER OFF.
I'LL PICK HIM TWENTY ROUGH-HOUSE TYPES, BUT IT SEEMS LIKE THROWING A LAMB TO THE WOLVES. DIGGERS EAT PINK-FACED POMMIES FOR BREAKFAST!
HE'S GOT THE GIFT O' THE GAB, ALL RIGHT. BUT I TELL YOU FRANKLY, MAC, I DON'T MUCH CARE FOR THIS SET-UP.

THE CAPTAIN GOT HIS TWENTY WOLVES. MEN WHO KNEW NEITHER FEAR NOR THE MEANING OF THE WORD DISCIPLINE...
MEN, I AM...
SO HELP ME, SPORT. I MUST BE SEEING THINGS!
IT'S THE CROWN PRINCE O' BRISBANE HIMSELF.
A GUFFAW OF LAUGHTER RANG THROUGH THE RANKS, THEN DIED TO AN EXPECTANT SILENCE AS PAYNE CALLED THE TWO MEN FORWARD...
I THINK YOU'D BETTER GET IT STRAIGHT. WE DON'T GO MUCH ON POMMIE BULL!
NOW NOW, NED, MANNERS! THAT AIN'T NO WAY TO SPEAK TO REGGIE!
I WAS ABOUT TO SAY, WE COMMENCE BATTLE DRILL TONIGHT. BUT PERHAPS RIGHT NOW WOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE MOMENT FOR A LITTLE UNARMED COMBAT TRAINING!

FOR A MOMENT THE DIGGERS STARED IN DISBELIEF AS CAPTAIN PAYNE CASUALLY STRIPPED TO THE WAIST. THEN WIDE GRINS OF DELIGHT BROKE OUT ON THEIR FACES. THIS WAS THE UNCOUTH LANGAUGE OF THE OUTBACK THAT THEY UNDERSTOOD...
AFTER YOU, DUSTY!
NO, KELLY, AFTER YOU! I'LL MOP UP WHAT'S LEFT.
COME, GENTLEMEN, GIVE YOURSELVES A CHANCE. BOTH AT ONCE, PLEASE.

THE TWO MEN LAUNCHED THEMSELVES FORWARD BUT THEY DID NOT EVEN MAKE CONTACT. A PILE-DRIVER BLOW STOPPED NED KELLY IN HIS TRACKS, AND A JUDO THROW SENT MILLER SOMERSAULTING...
UUUUGH!
STONE ME! HE'S A TORNADO!

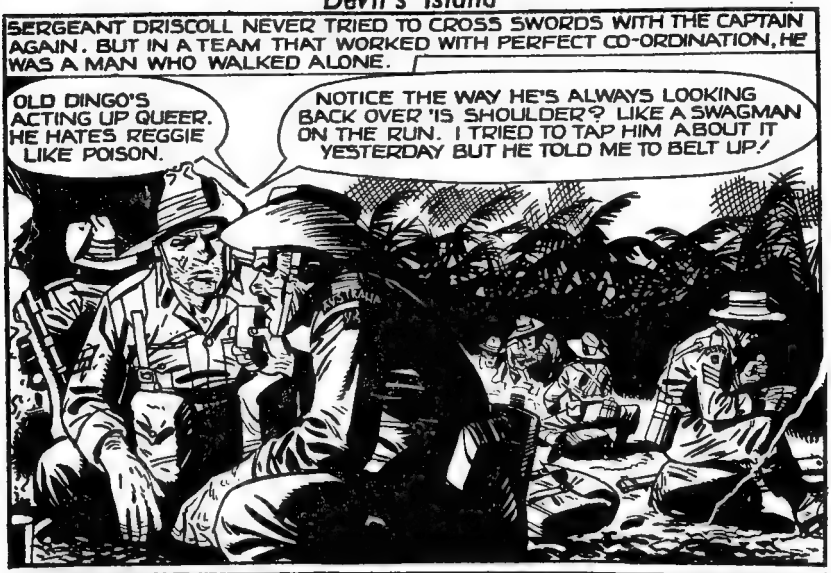
THE MEN DRESSED BACK INTO RANKS. IN THOSE FEW MOMENTS, THE CAPTAIN HAD WON THEIR RESPECT. THEN A SURLY FIGURE REPORTED TO PAYNE.
SERGEANT DRISCOLL, SIR. YOU WANTED TO SEE ME?
AH YES, SERGEANT. YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF KILURA SHOULD BE USEFUL TO US. TAKE OVER THIS SQUAD. WE MOVE OUT AT EIGHTEEN-HUNDRED HOURS TONIGHT, FULL FIELD MARCHING ORDER.
DUSTY LOOKED ALMOST ADMIRINGLY AFTER THE OFFICER AS HE WALKED OFF, BUT DRISCOLL SCOWLED.
FOR A POMMIE, 'E AIN'T A BAD SORT O' JOKER!
WHAT'S GOT INTO YOU BLOKES? JUST 'COS THE POMMIE CAN USE HIS MAULERS, YOU'RE EATING OUT OF HIS HAND. WAIT 'TIL WE HIT THE JUNGLE, THEN WE'LL SEE WHO'S SO TOUGH!
JUST BEFORE 1800 HOURS THAT NIGHT, A STORM BURST WITH ALL ITS TROPICAL SAVAGERY.
IT'S A RIGHT LIBERTY MAKING US HOOF THROUGH THIS LOT.
WE COULD ALL BE SNUG IN OUR LITTLE BIVVIES BUT FOR THAT PERISHIN' POMMIE!

CAPTAIN PAYNE SET A RELENTLESSLY HARD PACE. AS THE HOURS TICKED BY, EVEN THE JUNGLE-SEASONED VETERANS BEGAN TO LAG.
CAN-CAN WE HALT, SIR. THE MEN ARE FAIR TUCKERED OUT.
WE'RE NOT ON A SUNDAY SCHOOL OUTING, SERGEANT! PASS THE WORD BACK. ANY MAN WHO FALLS OUT GETS LEFT BEHIND! THIS COLUMN KEEPS MOVING!
GREY WITH FATIGUE, THEY HALTED JUST AS THE FIRST LIGHT OF MORNING PENETRATED THE DENSE FOLIAGE ABOVE THEIR HEADS.
RIGHT, MEN, THIRTY MINUTES REST. HARD TACK AND BULLY FOR BREAKFAST. MAKE THE MOST OF IT, WE GO INTO AN ATTACK UP THE NEXT RIDGE AT 0-FIVE-THIRTY HOURS.

DRISCOLL HAD HAD ENOUGH. AS PAYNE TURNED AWAY, THE SERGEANT'S FOOT SHOT OUT, AND THE CAPTAIN MEASURED HIS LENGTH IN THE THICK MUD.
SORRY, SIR. YOU SHOULD LOOK WHERE YOU'RE TREADING. JAPS GOT A NASTY HABIT O' PUTTING TRIP WIRES AROUND.
THE SERGEANT HAD TURNED SNEERINGLY AWAY WHEN A SLIVER OF STEEL FLICKERED ACROSS THE CLEARING...
WHAT THE..?
A LESSON FOR YOU, SERGEANT, NEVER TURN YOUR BACK ON THE ENEMY! RIGHT, ON YOUR FEET, MEN! WE'RE GOING INTO THAT ATTACK!
THE CAPTAIN'S ICY VOICE JERKED THE MEN TO THEIR FEET. OBEDIENTLY THEY MOVED OFF.
SPREAD OUT IN EXTENDED LINE. DON'T BUNCH UP LIKE A FLOCK O' SHEEP! GET THOSE BRENS OUT TO THE FLANKS!
I WON'T FORGET THAT IN A HURRY, MISTER BLOOMING PAYNE!

IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, PAYNE GOADED THEM ON UNMERCIFULLY. THEY PRACTISED WITH MACHINE GUN, BAYONET AND GRENADE AS THOUGH THEY HAD NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE.
MOVE, CONFOUND YOU! MY OLD GRANNIE COULD DO BETTER THAN THAT!

THROUGH LEECH AND CROCODILE INFESTED SWAMPS HE TOOK THEM – TO BREAKING POINT AND BEYOND.
WHEN I POINT TO A TREE I WANT IT SHOT UP IN TWO SECONDS FLAT! JAP SNIPERS DON'T GIVE SECOND CHANCES.
HE NEVER ASKED OF THEM ANYTHING HE COULD NOT DO BETTER OR FASTER HIMSELF AND THE DIGGERS TOOK THE POMMIE OFFICER TO THEIR HEARTS.


SERGEANT DRISCOLL NEVER TRIED TO CROSS SWORDS WITH THE CAPTAIN AGAIN. BUT IN A TEAM THAT WORKED WITH PERFECT CO-ORDINATION, HE WAS A MAN WHO WALKED ALONE.
OLD DINGO'S ACTING UP QUEER. HE HATES REGGIE LIKE POISON.
NOTICE THE WAY HE'S ALWAYS LOOKING BACK OVER 'IS SHOULDER? LIKE A SWAGMAN ON THE RUN. I TRIED TO TAP HIM ABOUT IT YESTERDAY BUT HE TOLD ME TO BELT UP!
AUSTRALIA

TWO WEEKS LATER, THEY REJOINED THE BATTALION. A BAND OF WALKING SCARECROWS THAT HAD BECOME THE HARDEST HITTING INFANTRY SOUTH OF THE EQUATOR.
WHAT THE BLAZES HAVE YOU DONE TO THAT BUNCH, CAPTAIN?
TURNED THEM INTO THE FORCE THAT WILL HOLD THE BRIDGE-HEAD UNTIL THE BATTALION GETS UP THE CLIFFS AT KILURA, SIR!
AUSTRALIA
AUSTRALIA

Chapter 4. Paid in Full

THE GHOST OF A YOUNG OFFICER ROSE TO HAUNT THE COLONEL...
WHEN WE HIT THAT ISLAND LAST TIME I'D HAVE PUT MY SHIRT ON YOUNG BLAKE, BUT HE LET US DOWN! NOW WE'RE PINNING OUR FAITH ON AN ENGLISHMAN WE HARDLY KNOW.
I RECKON THAT UNDERNEATH HIS ARISTOCRATIC VENEER, THAT POMMIE'S A PRETTY HARD NUT, SIR.
THE NONCHALANT EASE OF CAPTAIN PAYNE DID LITTLE TO ALLAY THE COLONEL'S ANXIETY...
LOOK, PAYNE. HOW CAN I BE CERTAIN HISTORY WON'T REPEAT ITSELF ON KILURA? IF WE'RE TRAPPED ON THE CLIFFS, WE WON'T STAND A SNOWBALL'S CHANCE IN HADES!
THE CAPTAIN WAS DEADLY SERIOUS AS HE REPLIED...
EVERY MAN OF THE LAST TEAM KNEW THE SUCCESS SIGNAL. WRITE A CODE WORD ON A PIECE OF RICE PAPER, SIR. IF I'M CAUGHT, I'LL DESTROY IT WITHOUT READING IT.
AFTER THE CAPTAIN LEFT, COLONEL HARDY SAT DEEP IN THOUGHT... EVERY MAN HAD KNOWN THE ORIGINAL SUCCESS SIGNAL. DID KILURA STILL GUARD SOME SECRET OF THAT FATEFUL NIGHT?

WITH ENGINES STOPPED, THE FRIGATE *FIREFLY* RODE GENTLY ON OILY CALM WATER. CAPTAIN PAYNE GAVE HIS LAST WHISPERED INSTRUCTIONS.
WITH ANY LUCK WE'LL MAKE AN UNOPPOSED LANDING. THEN I'LL LEAD THE JAUNT ROUND THE ISLAND TO WARM THINGS UP AND RENDEZVOUS BACK BY 0-THREE-HUNDRED HOURS. ANY QUESTIONS?
AS THE DINGHIES GLIDED SILENTLY IN TOWARDS THE ISLAND, SERGEANT DRISCOLL'S THOUGHTS WERE AS DARK AS THE CLIFFS THAT TOWERED ABOVE THEM. DESPERATELY, HE STROVE TO BLOT THE NIGHTMARE MEMORY OF DYING COMRADES...

PAYNE WAS THE FIRST TO REACH THE TOP OF THE CLIFF AFTER A LONG MUSCLE-CRACKING CLIMB. ONE BY ONE, DARK FIGURES DRAGGED THEMSELVES OVER TO SLUMP BESIDE HIM...
OKAY, CAPTAIN. ALL THE LADS ARE UP.
GOOD. MOVE UP TO THE EDGE OF THE JUNGLE AND DIG IN. I'M TAKING SERGEANT DRISCOLL AND MILLER TO PLANT THE FIREWORKS. SIT TIGHT, AND KEEP YOUR EARS OPEN.

IT TOOK FORTY-FIVE MINUTES FOR THE THREE MEN TO FORCE A WAY THROUGH THE MORASS OF UNDERGROWTH BETWEEN THE CLIFF AND THE JAP AIRSTRIP.
THEY'RE CHANGING THE GUARD! ONCE THAT BUNCH HAVE SHEERED OFF, WE'LL MOVE IN.
WE'RE WITH YOU, SPORT!

THE MUFFLED TRAMPING OF THE JAP GUARDS DIED AWAY INTO THE NIGHT. THE THREE UNSUSPECTING FRESH SENTRIES SETTLED DOWN TO THEIR TEDIOUS TURN OF DUTY.
ONLY TWO MORE DAYS OF THIS ACCURSED GUARD DUTY. BY NEXT WEEK, I SHALL BE ON LEAVE IN YOKOHAMA.
BUT DEATH WAS STEALING UPON THEM OUT OF THE DARKNESS...
COP THAT ONE, MATE, YOU HAD IT COMING TO YOU!
UUUGH!

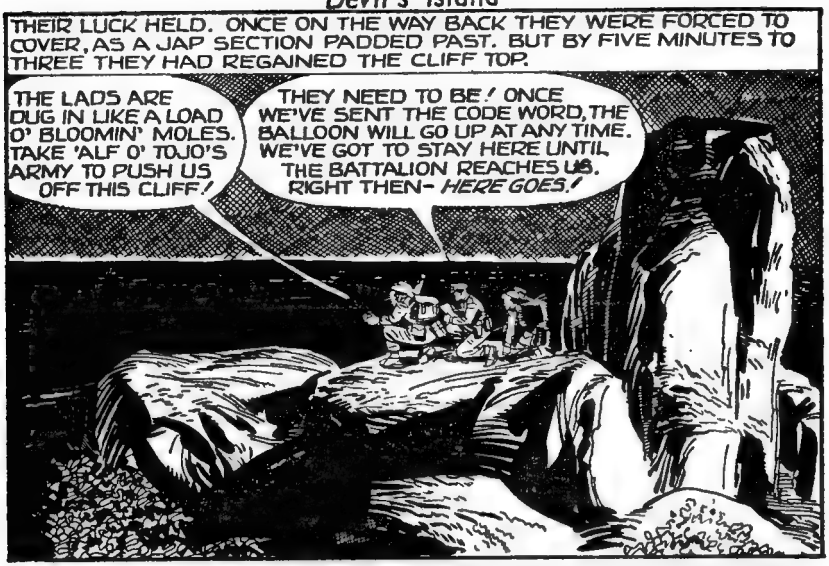
IN THE STRUGGLE, CAPTAIN PAYNE SLIPPED ON THE CRUMBLING EDGE OF THE WEAPON PIT AND PITCHED FORWARD HELPLESSLY AT THE FEET OF A JAP CORPORAL.
DIE, WHITE DEVIL!

FOR A MOMENT PAYNE LOOKED DEATH IN THE FACE. THEN A GREAT BLACK SHADOW BLOTTED OUT HIS VISION AND THE CRUSHING IMPACT OF FALLING BODIES DROVE THE BREATH FROM HIS LUNGS.

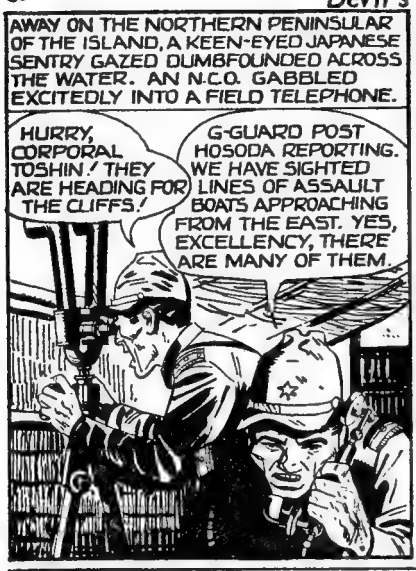
BY THE TIME THE DAZED CAPTAIN HAD STAGGERED TO HIS FEET IT WAS ALL OVER. SERGEANT DRISCOLL WAS DOWN, A LOW GROAN GRATING FROM HIS TWISTED LIPS – FOR HE HAD TAKEN THE THRUST MEANT FOR PAYNE.
WHAT-WHAT HAPPENED?
DINGO COPPED IT! LOOK'S LIKE HE'S IN A BAD WAY.
AUSTRALIA
CAREFULLY THE CAPTAIN PLUGGED A SHELL DRESSING INTO THE SERGEANT'S WOUND...
I'LL GIVE YOU A SHOT OF MORPHINE, DRISCOLL–THEN WE'LL GET YOU OUT. BUT WHY DID YOU SAVE MY LIFE? YOU'VE ALWAYS HATED MY GUTS!
I'VE REACHED THE END O' THE TRAIL, POMMIE–I'LL TELL YOU WHY I DID IT...
THE GREY, PAIN-RACKED FACE OF THE HARD-BITTEN AUSTRALIAN RELAXED AS THE DRUG TOOK EFFECT.
...I LET THE BATTALION DOWN LAST TIME, AN' I SAVED YOU 'COS YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN GET 'EM SAFELY ASHORE TONIGHT. PROP ME UP BEHIND THAT JAP GUN AND LEAVE ME. WHEN THE TIME COMES, MAYBE I CAN PAY BACK SOME O' THE DEBT. COME ON, DURN YOU– HELP ME!

SO IT WAS YOU THAT...
YEAH...I SPILT THE BEANS TO THE NIPS. I'VE LIVED WITH IT EVER SINCE AND IT AIN'T BEEN NICE COMPANY! NOW GET TO BLAZES OUT O' HERE...
AUSTRALIA
FOR SOME MOMENTS CAPTAIN PAYNE STARED WITH COMPASSION AT THE ROUGH HEWN FACE BEFORE HIM. THEN HE ROSE TO HIS FEET AND RAPPED OUT AN ORDER TO DUSTY MILLER.
GIVE ME A HAND TO SET THIS GUN UP AGAIN, DUSTY. WE'LL PROP THESE DEAD JAPS UP AS WELL, MAKE IT LOOK AS IF THE POST IS STILL MANNED.
YOU CAN'T LEAVE DINGO HERE, EVEN IF HE DID...

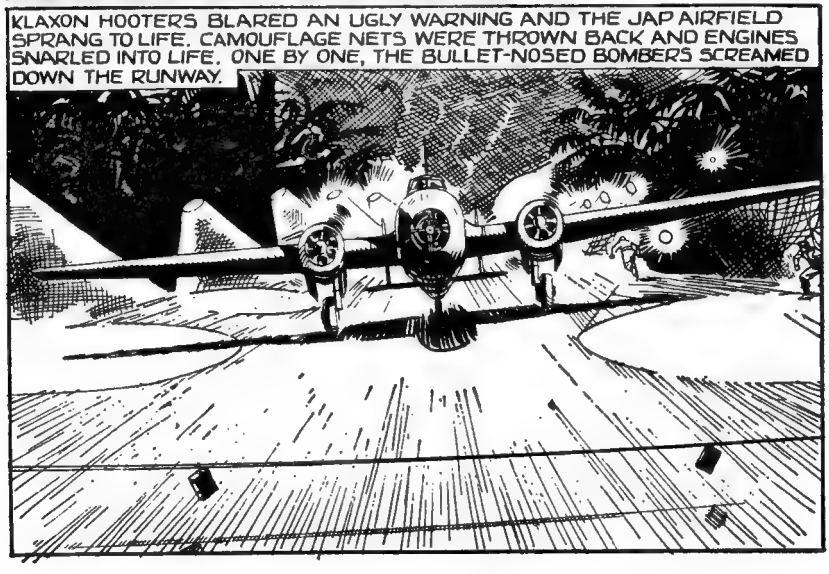
DUSTY'S PROTEST FELL ON DEAF EARS. WHEN THE TASK WAS COMPLETE...
WE'LL DO OUR BEST TO EVEN THE SCORE TONIGHT. GOODBYE, SERGEANT.
SO LONG, PAYNE — FOR A POMMIE, YOU AIN'T A BAD SORT!
THE TWO MEN MOVED OFF...
IT'S THE WAY HE WANTS IT, DUSTY! HE CAN'T WIPE THE SLATE CLEAN, BUT HE'S DOING HIS BEST. NO MAN CAN DO MORE. COME ON— THERE'S A LOT TO DO!
IT WAS CLOSE TO H-HOUR. THREE HUNDRED YARDS ALONG THE AIR-STRIP, THEY STRETCHED SEVERAL WIRES TIGHTLY ACROSS THE RUNWAYS AND CONNECTED LETHAL SLABS OF FUSED T.N.T. TO THEM.
LAST ONE FIXED! WHEN THE NIPS HIT THIS LOT, THEY'LL GET AIRBORNE ALL RIGHT!
FAIR DINKUM JOB, REGGIE. I GOT TO HAND IT TO YOU, SPORT, YOU KNOW YOUR ONIONS, AN' NO MISTAKE!


THEIR LUCK HELD. ONCE ON THE WAY BACK THEY WERE FORCED TO COVER, AS A JAP SECTION PADDED PAST. BUT BY FIVE MINUTES TO THREE THEY HAD REGAINED THE CLIFF TOP.
THE LADS ARE DUG IN LIKE A LOAD O' BLOOMIN' MOLES. TAKE 'ALF O' TOJO'S ARMY TO PUSH US OFF THIS CLIFF!
THEY NEED TO BE! ONCE WE'VE SENT THE CODE WORD, THE BALLOON WILL GO UP AT ANY TIME. WE'VE GOT TO STAY HERE UNTIL THE BATTALION REACHES US. RIGHT THEN- HERE GOES!

DEAD ON 0300 HOURS THE FAINT WINKING LIGHT WAS SIGHTED FROM THE WAITING FRIGATE. A PUZZLED SIGNALS OFFICER REPORTED TO COLONEL HARDY.
THE SIGNAL WAS JUST ONE WORD, SIR! KOOKABURRA! WHAT THE DEVIL DO THEY MEAN?
WE'RE GOING TO KNOCK HELL OUT O' THAT ISLAND, THAT'S WHAT IT MEANS! AWAY BOATS!


AWAY ON THE NORTHERN PENINSULAR OF THE ISLAND, A KEEN-EYED JAPANESE SENTRY GAZED DUMBFOUNDED ACROSS THE WATER. AN N.C.O. GABBLED EXCITEDLY INTO A FIELD TELEPHONE.
HURRY, CORPORAL TOSHIN! THEY ARE HEADING FOR THE CLIFFS!
G-GUARD POST HOSODA REPORTING. WE HAVE SIGHTED LINES OF ASSAULT BOATS APPROACHING FROM THE EAST. YES, EXCELLENCY, THERE ARE MANY OF THEM.

AT HIS OPERATIONAL HEADQUARTERS, COLONEL KINTO GREETED THE NEWS WITH A MIRTHLESS SMILE.
THEY ARE MAD! ORDER INTERCEPTOR SQUADRONS INTO THE AIR AT ONCE. TWO COMPANIES OF INFANTRY TO THE CLIFFS. THEY WILL HAVE GOOD TARGET PRACTICE, PICKING OFF THE SURVIVORS FROM THE AIR STRIKE.
THEY ARE HEADING STRAIGHT IN FROM THE EAST.


KLAXON HOOTERS BLARED AN UGLY WARNING AND THE JAP AIRFIELD SPRANG TO LIFE. CAMOUFLAGE NETS WERE THROWN BACK AND ENGINES SNARLED INTO LIFE. ONE BY ONE, THE BULLET-NOSED BOMBERS SCREAMED DOWN THE RUNWAY.

BUT THE WEB OF DESTRUCTION HAD BEEN WOVEN WITH DEADLY PRECISION. JUST BEFORE THE LEADING BOMBER TOOK OFF, A GREAT SHEET OF FLAME LEAPT FROM THE GROUND. THEN, WITH A TUMULTUOUS ROAR, THE MACHINE EXPLODED WITH ITS ENTIRE BOMB LOAD.

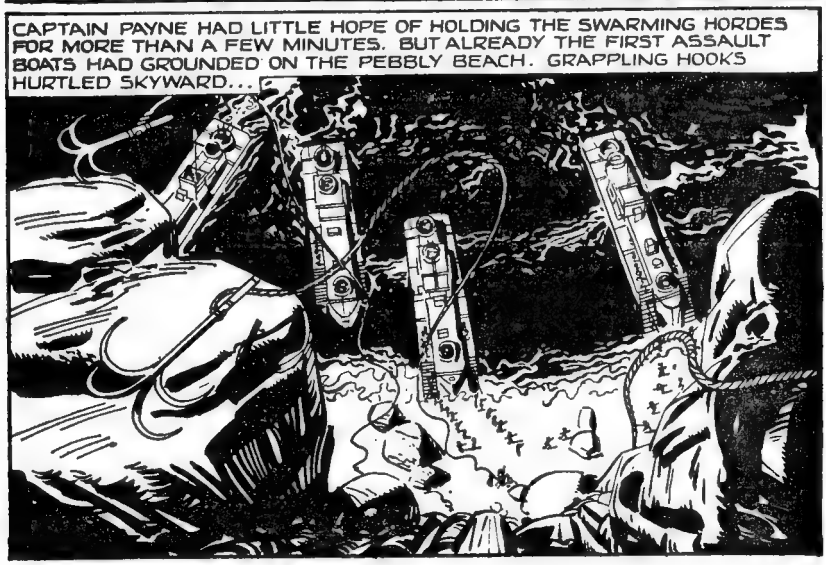
FOLLOWING PILOTS MADE DESPERATE EFFORTS TO ARREST THE HEADLONG RUSH OF THEIR PLANES, BUT THEY WERE COMMITTED ON A COLLISION COURSE. ONE AFTER ANOTHER THEY ERUPTED IN A HOLOCAUST OF EXPLODING BOMBS, FUEL AND T.N.T.

AN OMINOUS RED GLOW SPRANG FROM THE CENTRE OF THE ISLAND. SHOCK WAVES BENT THE TALL PALMS AND TWENTY AUSTRALIANS TIGHTENED THE GRIP ON THEIR GUNS AND GRINNED WITH DELIGHT.

SERGEANT DRISCOLL WAS THE FIRST TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY INFANTRY. A SMILE CREASED HIS RUGGED FACE AS HE TRAVERSED THE GUN ACROSS THE LINE OF SOLDIERS SWARMING FORWARD TO CLEAR THE WRECKAGE.
THEN HIS THUMBS FROZE IN A DEAD MAN'S GRIP ON THE FIRING BUTTON.

THE BATTLE WAS ON. WITH SHRILL SCREAMS, JAPANESE SOLDIERS FLUNG THEMSELVES FROM THE JUNGLE ON TO THE GUNS OF THE AUSSIES.
LET 'EM HAVE IT! FIRE!
BANZAI! BANZAI!

THE FIRST WAVE WERE CUT DOWN EVEN AS THEY EMERGED FROM THE UNDERGROWTH, BUT OTHERS SCRAMBLED OVER THEIR FALLEN COMRADES WITH FEARLESS FANATICISM.
DON'T GIVE GROUND, MEN. WE'VE GOT TO HOLD 'EM HERE!


CAPTAIN PAYNE HAD LITTLE HOPE OF HOLDING THE SWARMING HORDES FOR MORE THAN A FEW MINUTES. BUT ALREADY THE FIRST ASSAULT BOATS HAD GROUNDED ON THE PEBBLY BEACH. GRAPPLING HOOKS HURTLED SKYWARD...

LIKE AN ARMY OF ANTS, SIX HUNDRED MEN POURED ACROSS THE BEACHES AND BEGAN TO CLAW THEIR WAY UP THE CLIFF WALLS.

ASSAULT COMPANIES AWAY. BRING IN THE VICKERS GUNS AND MORTARS.

FIGHTING EVERY INCH OF THE WAY, PAYNE AND HIS MEN WERE BEING REMORSELESSLY BEATEN BACK BY THE SHEER WEIGHT OF THE ONCOMING ENEMY. OF THE ORIGINAL TWENTY, ONLY EIGHT WERE STILL IN THE FIGHT.

NED! NED, MATE, YOU CAN'T JACK IT IN NOW...

HANG ON, MEN!

THEN, WITH A TRIUMPHANT ROAR, THE XITH. BATTALION SWEPT FORWARD BEHIND A LINE OF NAKED BAYONETS. DUSTY ROSE SLOWLY FROM BESIDE HIS DEAD COMRADE AND TOOK UP HIS RIFLE IN A STEELY GRIP.

REST EASY, NED. I'LL MAKE 'EM PAY FOR THIS, MATE!

FORWARD, MEN! FORWARD THE FIGHTING ELEVENTH!

NOTHING COULD CHECK THAT RESOLUTE CHARGE. THE JAPS BROKE AND RAN. PAYNE FOUND DUSTY CONDUCTING HIS OWN PRIVATE VENDETTA.
COME ON, DUSTY! WE'VE GOT A JOB TO DO.
BE WITH YOU, ME OLD CHINA – JUST PAYING 'EM BACK FOR NED!
THE DEFENCES OF THE FORTRESS WERE BREACHED. SYSTEMATICALLY, THE AUSTRALIANS SET ABOUT CLEARING THE ISLAND OF JAPS. COMPANY BY COMPANY, THEY FANNED OUT. THE AIR FILLED WITH THE HEAVY CRUMP OF THREE-INCH MORTAR BURSTS AND THE TEARING JABBER OF HEAVY MACHINE GUNS.
OKAY, LADS, LET'S MOVE IN AND FINISH 'EM OFF.

IT HAD COST THE AUSTRALIANS DEAR TO GAIN A FOOTHOLD, BUT ONCE ASHORE, THEY FOUGHT WITH SUCH A MERCILESS TENACITY AND BY 0800 HOURS THE ISLAND WAS THEIRS.
ALL RESISTANCE CEASED, SIR.
ANYONE SEEN CAPTAIN PAYNE AND HIS MEN SINCE WE LANDED?
I THINK THAT'S THEM NOW, SIR— OR WHAT'S LEFT OF THEM!
DUSTY MILLER'S FACE CRACKED INTO A WIDE GRIN AT THE COLONEL'S GROWL OF INDIGNATION.
WHERE THE DEVIL HAVE YOU BEEN?
DON'T GET ALL STEAMED UP, COLONEL. ME AND REGGIE HAVE PICKED UP HIS NIBS HERE, THE JAP COMMANDER. JUST BEFORE HE COMMITTED HARA-KIRI, TOO!
CAPTAIN PAYNE SNAPPED A QUESTION AT HIS ARROGANT PRISONER. THE JAPANESE COLONEL ANSWERED IN FAULTLESS ENGLISH.
COLONEL, YOU CAPTURED A YOUNG LIEUTENANT FROGMAN. WAS IT HE WHO BETRAYED THE BATTALION?
NO! HE WAS A VERY BRAVE MAN. HE DIED IN SILENCE.
THEN-THEN WHO WAS IT THAT GAVE YOU THE INFORMATION?

NOBODY QUITE SAW WHAT HAPPENED NEXT. SOMEHOW, THE JAPANESE COLONEL BROKE FROM THE CAPTAIN'S GRIP AND JUST FOR ONCE, PAYNE'S REACTIONS WERE VERY SLOW.
MY OATH!
SORRY, SIR. I MUST HAVE SLIPPED!
IT WAS ALL OVER IN SECONDS. THEN THE COLONEL'S FACE THAWED SLOWLY.
BY THUNDER, I'LL SEE THAT YOUNG BLAKE'S NAME IS CLEARED! BUT NOW WE'LL NEVER KNOW. PERHAPS IT'S BETTER THAT WAY!
I RATHER THINK IT IS, SIR.
AUSTRALIA
CAPTAIN PAYNE'S EYES MET THOSE OF DUSTY MILLER. THEY BOTH REMEMBERED A LONELY FIGURE THAT HAD TRIED VERY HARD TO REPAY HIS DEBT.

Devil's Island

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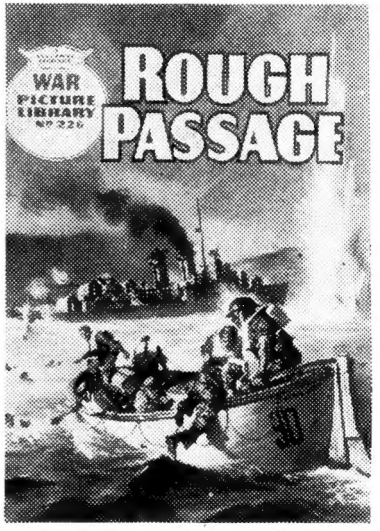

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